

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CONTACT:

Karen Larimore Wilkinson  
Public Information and Communications Manager  
City of Salisbury  
217 S. Main Street  
Salisbury, North Carolina 28144  
Work Phone: 704-638-2113 Cell: 704-213-1050  
Home Phone: 704-633-7123  
Information: <http://www.salisburync.gov>  
Work Email Contact: [kwilk@salisburync.gov](mailto:kwilk@salisburync.gov)  
Home Email Contact: [kwilkinson2@carolina.rr.com](mailto:kwilkinson2@carolina.rr.com)

**Salisbury-Rowan United Invites Entire Community to Join Forces  
to Deter Youth Violence and Gang Participation**

***Diverse Groups Pull Together to Provide a Safer Community for All***

Salisbury, NC\_June 5, 2007 – Salisbury Mayor Susan Kluttz announced today that final preparations are underway for a community-wide conference entitled, ***Salisbury-Rowan United: Creating an Action Agenda for a Safer Community and a Positive Future for our Youth.*** The informational, public input session will be held on Thursday, June 14<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 pm at the Salisbury Civic Center, 315 S. Boundary Street. All citizens of Salisbury/Rowan are cordially invited to attend the two-hour session and offer their own distinct ideas and creative solutions.

Guest Speaker Brian Beatty, North Carolina Secretary of Crime Control and Public Safety, will offer attendees an overview of youth violence and gang activity throughout the state. In addition, Salisbury Police Officer Todd Sides will share pertinent awareness information with the audience, regarding local gang activity. The educational segment of the conference will be followed by an opportunity for those in attendance to break off into various groups, participate in community conversation, and share positive ideas and solutions. Among the topics which will be discussed by groups are increased awareness for existing programs and mentoring venues which offer a sense of belonging for youth, implementation of constructive and preventative community activities which provide alternatives to gang involvement, and the continuation of a comprehensive educational program. All feedback and suggestions offered by individuals will be documented by the group's facilitator and names will not be recorded. These creative ideas, thoughts and proposals will be utilized to create a community-wide plan of action for constructing a safer Salisbury-Rowan environment.

The conference comes on the heels of the tragic shooting death of 13-year old Treasure Feamster, which took place in the JC Price American Legion parking lot area, during mid-March of this year. In attendance at a birthday celebration, Feamster was innocently struck down as she was caught in the middle of a gun-fire exchange by opposing gang members who attended the event. The tragedy set off a wave of community concern regarding local youth violence and gang activity. Police Chief Mark Wilhelm shares, "This is a community problem and we need community input. Together, we can make a difference."

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During the next City Council meeting, held only four days following the violent shooting, Mayor Kluttz expressed the outrage of the Council over this senseless tragedy and vowed that the City would take steps necessary to coordinate a community-wide effort to address the problem. She announced tentative plans for an upcoming summit. Kluttz shares that citizen response was overwhelmingly positive and notes that "Each day since the announcement, individuals and organizations have called my office offering their help, as well as those who have already begun taking steps to become involved. I have been particularly impressed by the faith community and the many churches which have been willing to reach out into the community to offer assistance beyond their congregations. For example, fifteen of our area churches teamed up to offer an inter-racial and inter-denominational revival just last week. Youth Violence and Gang Awareness were among the many topics covered through workshop sessions, held each night." The Mayor adds, "In the same spirit, I truly feel that the June session will encompass a widely diverse group and that by gathering for one common cause, our accomplishments can be many. **Salisbury-Rowan United** will offer concerned citizens, churches, civic groups, law enforcement, schools, agencies, local businesses, youth services, mentors and so many more entities, the opportunity to work together to create affirmative solutions for deterring violence." Kluttz reiterates, "Everyone is invited and all voices are welcomed."

Following the June 14<sup>th</sup> conference, a community wide action plan will be formulated and initiated. Interested parties will have the opportunity to support this community outreach by volunteering, mentoring, supporting an established program, or by assisting in the creation of a new youth initiative. In addition, printed **Project SAFE Salisbury** awareness materials will be utilized to assist with the educational aspect. "**V.I.S.I.O.N.**" (**V**iolence **I**ntervention **S**upport **I**n **O**ur **N**eighborhoods) booklets for adults and "**Salisbury SAFE Kids**" activity and adventure booklets for children will be made available for local group distribution at no charge. Adult booklets share a basic awareness background on gangs, identifiers, slang, symbols, and hand signals, as well as information for parents on how to detect if your child is involved in gang activity. The children's materials, created especially for kindergarten through grade 5, provide safety smarts for kids with fun activities, puzzles and games. To receive these complimentary publications which will be available for distribution in July, please contact Karen Wilkinson, Public Information and Communications Manager, at 704-638-2113.

Those who would like to offer suggestions or ideas, but are unable to attend the conference, are encouraged to contact the Mayor's office by calling 704-638-5231. These thoughts and concepts received by phone will be recorded and utilized to assist in the creation of the community-wide action plan.

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